



## ***There Are No Secrets***

FR. THOMAS M. SANTA, CSSR

**A** familiar Gospel reassures us, in the name of Jesus, that “there is nothing hidden that will not become visible” (Luke 8:17). This Gospel promises there is no need to fear; all is in the hands of God. This promise is comforting and challenging. It’s a comfort to hear the promise of the Lord that there is no need to fear, that he will stand by us and support us. On the other hand, the challenge is how to live in a world where there are ultimately no secrets.

For people of faith, the only way to live and prosper in a world where there are no secrets is to live a life of transparency, a life where the truth is always the defining moment. Such a life reflects the teaching of the Lord in another place when he tells us to “let your ‘Yes’ mean ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No’ mean ‘No’” (Matthew 5:37). A transparent life is one lived so profoundly that people might exclaim, “There is no duplicity in him” (John 1:47), which is what the Lord said when he was introduced to the Apostle Philip. A transparent life is one where the famous question of Pontius Pilate could never be asked. At the moment of Jesus’ passion and impending death, Pilate wonders, “What is truth?” (John 18:37).

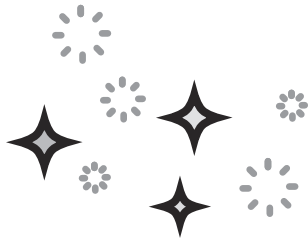
But how do we find truth in our world? How do we discover transparency and believe that what we encounter is ultimately life giving? Do we turn to the cable news network with the trademark, “We report. You decide”? Do we listen to a trial witness,

believing the person’s pledge to God to “tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth”?

When we seek the truth, we need to recognize that sometimes we’ll be misled deliberately, and sometimes a specific experience won’t be what it seems to be. Part of this is the fact that some people, organizations, and institutions—some with great authority in our lives—routinely deceive us and never seem convinced of the necessity to tell the truth. Still other experiences in life lead us to



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believe that what we're hearing or experiencing is truthful when in fact there's something missing or purposely glossed over. For example, the magician's slight-of-hand is deliberately and entertainingly misleading. And the trendy marketing slogan trumpeting the benefits of a new product likely omits its less-than-satisfying characteristics.

The politicians and framers of public opinion who fill our media ignore the unfavorable, focusing on the spin that promotes their point of view. The A-list screen star ensures he's photographed only on his best side, never when he's unprepared.

As we navigate our world, we learn that even though we desire to be people of truth, even though we treasure the honest word and the correct and helpful answer to our questions, we must nevertheless be on our guard and develop a certain healthy sense of doubt and critical thinking. To be people who live the truth and desire to mirror the kingdom of God in the choices and actions that we daily make doesn't mean we're necessarily easily fooled or misled. We may well choose to presume good intentions and be willing to give a person the benefit of the doubt, but we also want to see results and to experience that our trust is returned.

Redemption and a life of grace are not served well by slight-of-hand, the latest spin, or anything else that might distract or muddle our focus and commitment.

Jesus teaches us, "I am the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6). In the Lord there is only transparency. In the Lord there is only truth. If we're confident of his promise, all fear begins to leave us, anxiety is no longer part of our lives, and we can be comforted that all is in his hands. "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10).

Ultimately this is the point to which we are led if we seek the truth and believe that all will be revealed and that nothing will be hidden. Ultimately all illusion is taken away and only the truth remains. This is both comforting and challenging, and no doubt a bit of both for a person who has scrupulosity.

Scrupulosity feeds on "secrets" or at least the supposed "secrets" of the scrupulous mind. Only the illusion perpetuated by scrupulosity—the constant nagging question and doubt—can take a simple truth and twist it in such a manner that what is grace becomes rather a sin. Normal human reactions, decisions, and judgments are twisted and turned into heaping piles of mortal sin, and the person who suffers becomes buried under the weight of this "no sin that pretends to be sin." No argument is strong enough to even begin to move the pile and reveal the truth that it hides. Arguments that favor grace become sinister temptations and an even more burdensome illusion that robs a person of peace.

Thankfully the promise of Jesus is ultimately reassuring. The illusion and the suffering that comes with the experience of scrupulosity will not persist. What will one day be revealed, and which struggles to be made transparent, is the loving and forgiving embrace of our Father in heaven. The manifestations of God's grace and blessing will prevail. It's not a secret. It's a promise. ✨

# True Self-Esteem

**At any given moment**, we are attacked by the idea that we are not what we are supposed to be, nor what we hoped to be, not to mention what we professed or believed ourselves to be. Hope fades with disappointment.

Personal acceptance is a sign of maturity. Life, with its challenges and circumstances, reveals our strengths and capabilities, as well as our limits.

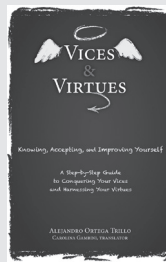
Self-acceptance is also an act of justice toward God, who made each one of us suitable to our vocation and mission in life. He doesn't make mistakes in his creations. He gave each one of us all that is necessary to realize ourselves fully. He did not give us our vices or obstacles, but he can help us turn these into positive traits, even if it takes us a long time to see those positive traits revealed. In the same way, just because God did not give us a particular skill, talent, or appearance does not mean we have been denied, but that God has something else in store for us. We could call this "the gift of not being."

Acceptance does not mean, as some believe, having low self-esteem. Besides being an injustice to God, low self-esteem can keep us from using our gifts to become the person God created us to be. Not appreciating the gifts that God has given us can also lead us to work day and night to be like other people who have different gifts than we do. We can end up being a stressed-out, imperfect, and unsatisfied imitation of a person we were never meant to be in the first place.

Balance is not an easy task, especially when we give so much importance to what others may think or say about us. Centuries ago, in his book *The Imitation of Christ*, Thomas à Kempis wrote a phrase that is surprisingly relevant today: "Praise adds nothing to [who you are], nor does blame take anything from it. You are what you are, and you cannot be said to be better than you are in God's sight."

True self-esteem consists of recognizing, valuing, and appreciating who we are with objectivity and gratitude, nothing more or less. It is here where self-esteem merges with humility, because humility is truth. We struggle at times, wasting precious energy, attempting to model a false image of ourselves. We give ourselves too much importance in an effort to prove to ourselves that we are what we really are not.

Only those who accept and love themselves for who they are can enjoy inner peace. As accurately stated by G.K. Chesterton: "Angels fly because they take themselves lightly." ✨



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# Mailbox

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**Q.** *I ran a red light the other day because of distracted driving. Thankfully no one was hurt, but I did receive a ticket. When I confess this sin in confession, is it a mortal sin or a venial sin?*

**A.** It is not a sin at all. It is a legal infraction, a violation of the traffic laws that govern the use of a car. The legal penalty attached to the breaking of the law is a fine. There's a difference between violating a law and a sin. The presence of one does not guarantee the presence of the other. Regarding the reason you were ticketed, I strongly advise you to focus on your driving when you're behind the wheel. Turn off your cell phone and minimize all distractions.



**Q.** *I am very anxious about our parish's celebration of first Communion. Although I love watching the little children receive their first holy Communion, many people in line—including parents and family members of the first communicants—should not receive Communion. Do I have any obligation in this situation?*

**A.** If your anxiety overwhelms your ability to enjoy this wonderful celebration of the Catholic family in prayer and worship, I suggest you choose to attend another Mass. If you do go to the first-Communion Mass, enjoy the children and don't concern yourself with what others might be doing or not doing. You're not their judge, and you have no obligation in this situation to do anything.



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